

In the Specification:

Please amend the specification as follows:

[0025] Figure 1 is a top view schematic block diagram illustrating one embodiment of a barrier 100 for protecting an object, such as a utility pole 102 from encroaching elements. In one embodiment, the barrier 100 may comprise an organic bentonite-based material 104 and an outer boundary surface 106 for protecting the utility pole 102. The organic bentonite-based material 104 may comprise a mixture of primarily sodium bentonite. In one embodiment, the mixture comprises at least 50% bentonite. The remainder of the mixture may comprise soil, gravel, pebbles, and the like. Figures 1, 2, and 6 depict the material 104 with large pebbles. This illustration is by way of example only, in order to depict the organic nature of the material 104.

[0026] Advantageously, sodium bentonite provides an environment that prevents growth around the utility pole 102 and is harmless to the environment. Specifically, the bentonite in the material 104 deprives seeds, roots, and plants of water and provides a salinity level which is detrimental to plant growth. This creates a region about the base of the utility pole 102 that may serve as a fire break in the event of a forest fire. Additionally, insects that may damage the utility pole 102, such as termites, are less likely to infest the utility pole 102 because the region is devoid of plant growth. Also, sodium bentonite absorbs water and swells to as much as fifteen times its mass, then forming a strong water and chemical proof seal that helps prevent rotting of the utility pole 102. The material 104 may also comprise mixtures formed substantially of, but not limited to, Bentonite, Smectite, Montmorillonite, High Swelling Bentonite, Wyoming Bentonite, Western Bentonite, Texas Bentonite, Alumina Silicate Clay, or Hydrated Aluminum Silicate.